LINES

COMMEMORATIVE

OF

THE AWFUL CONFLAGRATION

OF

ST. ROCH'S,

May 28th, 1845.

Séminaire de Québec. 1861.

QUEBEC:

1845.

Ete
All-
Mys
Th'
How
In al

The
And
Thy
Terr
On g
Dart
Veng
And
E'en
Thy
Whil
Swee

Reme
Nor
Wher
Laid
And
Displ

Eternal King! who dwell'st enthron'd on high,
All-glorious God, of awful majesty!
Mysterious—dread—and potent to fulfil
Th' unerring dictates of thy holy will:—
How should weak mortals tremble at thy might!
In all thy fearful judgments just and right.

The storm is thine wherewith to sweep the land:
And the fierce whirlwind moves at thy command!
Thy voice all-dreadful thunders in the sky,
Terrific wrath denouncing from on high,
On guilty man—while the red lightning's blaze
Darts, thro' the parting clouds, vindictive rays:—
Vengeance and punishment hast thou in store,
And canst, from fiery phials, fiercely pour,
E'en as thou listest, on rebellious worms,
Thy desolating wrath in fire and storms;
While swift destruction driven by thy breath,
Sweeps thro' the world, and does the work of death.

Remember, O! my soul, that fearful day,—
Nor let the solemn feeling pass away,
When God, arising in his righteous ire,
Laid waste our City with devouring fire;
And for the sins of men against his name
Displayed his wrath in whirlwind and in flame;

Scatt'ring destruction from his throne on high,
And breathing vengeance from the redd'ning sky:
To teach rebellious sinners what his power,
When roused, can do—in compass of an hour;
And what, in other worlds, they have to fear,
Who mock the fury of his anger here:—
That men may pause, and conscience-stricken, stay
Their course ungodly, ere the dreaded day
That seals for ever their eternal doom,
Consign them, unrepenting, to the tomb;—
Then may they dread a more vindictive power,
A fiercer vengeance, and a fierier hour.—
Know then, O! thoughtless man, nor to thy crimes
Add wilful blindness in these sinful times,
When bold transgressors, harden'd fearfully,
No hand of God or Providence, can see,
No power divine in visitations sent;—
And hear no warning voice, that bids "repent":—
Know, that when God Almighty bares his arm,
And the earth trembles 'neath the dire alarm
Of judgments swiftly coming—wasting wide—
While woe and terror reign on every side—
Know that the sins of men, abounding high,
Have pleaded hard for vengeance from the sky;
Have ope'd the wrath-stored phials of our God,
And lifted in his hand th' avenging rod:—
This to believe, is penitence begun;
Who impiously denies it, is undone;
At least, if persevering to the last,
Light springs—but, when the day of grace is past.—

There was a day of solemn pomp and glee,
When gravity combined with pageantry;

And superstition bore religion's name,
—But in *that* " *holy* Church" 'tis all the same,—
Pomp, pageantry and superstition there
Are more accounted than the voice of prayer ;—
And outward show, and forms of specious dress,
Whate'er they *are*, may *look* like righteousness,
And pass for such, when man is blinded well,
Believing, duteous, all the priest may tell.—
It was a day, a Sabbath day, and all
The sons of Rome, obedient to the call,
From far and near in thronging numbers meet
To view their Saviour borne along the street,
Whom in their pious hands the priesthood bear,
And raise aloft th' incarnate God in air ;—
To sight display'd, that every eye may see
The grand procession of the Deity.
There gaudy colours mark the wondrous day,
And waving streamers make a fair display :
Their varied hues attract the gazing eye,
And fill the madden'd soul with vanity :
And sprightly sounds, and music's voice are there,
Unhallow'd songs, and more unhallow'd prayer :—
Tempestuous mirth, idolatrous delight :—
Such was the scene when soar'd the Host in sight,
And every anxious trembling devotee
Enraptured turn'd the solemn pomp to see ;
Much marvelling how priestly power and skill,
Amazing thought ! could make a God at will :—
Transform the common elements of food
To their Redeemer's sacred flesh and blood :
'Tis wondrous strange :—but what the church declares
And priests proclaim, to disbelieve who dares ?

O! how delusion has the power to bind
In chains of darkness the misguided mind;
Defrauding reason with a vain pretence,
And robbing man of even *common* sense!

Pass we this scene:—there came another day,
And with it, vengeance that would not delay:
A day of darkness, fire, and stormy wind,
Commingling wrath, and left no trace behind,
No trace, no vestige of the guilty scene;
Scarce what might tell where such display had been.
The gather'd wrath of the All-seeing God
Fell in the scourge of his avenging rod;
So much had men against the truth presumed
Their pride and pomp must be at once consumed.

Lo! from yon crackling roof the flames aspire;
The rapid bell proclaims the alarm of fire.
Yet 'twas a flickering flame, scarce heeded then,
Such oft occur, will oft occur again:
So thought the common mind; but ne'ertheless
As man must pity fellow-man's distress,
Some gather round to quench the rising blaze,
While others listless stand, and heedless gaze.
Alas! how man can look on other's grief,
And scarcely pity, and give no relief.
Calmly survey his fellow creature's woe
So he himself can but escape the blow:—
But general judgments all are doom'd to share,
And each his part, at least, of ill must bear.—

Few who beheld that morn the rising sun
His daily glorious course commence to run,

Could e'er have pictured the sad scene of woe
His setting beams, at close of day, would show—
Yet there was darkness in the threatening sky,
The gloomy heaven seemed low'ring fearfully;
And fitful gusts of sudden wind were sent
With angry howl, and ominous portent;
And all appearance seem'd to indicate
Some coming wrath, and near impending fate.
For now, at mid-day, when with busy aid
The gathering crowds the blazing streets invade,
With engines—water—and whate'er became
To stay the progress of the spreading flame;
Which, 'spite all efforts—now too late applied,
And long neglected, scatter'd far and wide;—
The spiry blazes shoot into the sky,
And dark and volumed smoke ascends on high,
From numerous roofs enveloped in a cloud
Of wreathing flame that glows, and crackles loud;
While fear and horror dwell on every face
And dire confusion reigns thro'out the place.—

Such was the scene, the hurrying to and fro,
The noise, the shouting, and the voice of woe;
The vain attempts of multitudes to save
The little all long years of labour gave,
As loaded vehicles with haste convey
The relics of their property away,
And pile the general aggregation where
'Twas hoped, but vainly hoped, the flame would s

But hark! the gathering thunder roars on high,
And the fork'd lightning flashes through the sky,

In sudden blaze ; and growing in its might
The strong wind rises to a fearful height,
Borne whirling on with such impetuous force
As nought opposing may resist its course :
Then,—as the breath of heaven had fann'd the flame,
Swept fierce along the fiery deluge came,
With triple fury spreading far and wide
The multiplying blaze on every side,
As burning shingles furiously were driven,
Toss'd round and whirl'd, athwart the darken'd heaven,
And clouds of cinders and black blazes rise,
And volumed smoke commingling with the skies
In awful grandeur,—while the lurid glare
Intensely glows, and heats the heavy air.—

Then rose the voice of woe in fearful wail,
And the loud shriek was heard above the gale.
The flying masses rush in mingled throng,
And the pursuing flames are borne along,
Chasing before them in tumultous tide,
Th' assembled hosts that flee on every side :
No steady gale that blows its even course,
But sudden whirl-blasts of resistless force,
Scattering the glowing embers divers ways,
And kindling up one universal blaze ;
A moment's work, so furiously it blew,
And carried conflagration as it flew.
Then might the calm and watchful eye behold
A scene of woe no language can unfold :—
In that fierce flight, amid the general strife,
All seek to save—not property, but life ;
Rush in a torrent thro' the burning street,

While o'er their heads the vivid blazes meet,
In fiery concave,—and beneath arise
Loud wailings, shrieks, and lamentable cries;
The mingled voice of brute and human-kind,
In one extremity of woe combined.—

But who, alas! the hapless fate may speak
Of helpless infants and of women weak,
Of invalids and those bereft of power
To 'scape the terrors of that fatal hour,
Doom'd to a fiery death, with none to care,
Or heed the piercing shriek of wild despair
From parched lips, amid the stifling smoke,
Where cries unheard the sable volumes choke
To empty utterance, as the flames aspire
And wrap their breathing forms in the devouring fire.

O! tale of horrors, who may recognise
'Mid the warm mounds of ashes that arise
In that wide waste,—the dear but missing one,
A shapeless corse and blacken'd skeleton.
There midst the general ruin sunk to rest
The helpless mother pressing to her breast
Her screaming babe, and save her voice of wail,
Nought to reveal her miserable tale:
Together fall they, mingling as they lay,
In one sad lot their undistinguish'd clay.
Aged, infirm, and sick, they shared the doom
Of that day's wrath, and found a fiery tomb:—
And e'en the lifeless corse, deck'd out and spread,
That hoped, at least, a green and grassy bed,
'Scaped not the wreckless blaze, but burn'd away,
And robb'd the worms of their accustom'd prey.—

Night came at last, but by the set of sun
Scarce was the work of desolation done;
Still rise the blazes, and, ascending high,
Dispute the daylight with the darkening sky,
Commingling with the sable clouds of night
Their angry glare, and giving fearful light.
Shines the red blaze on countenances there
That calmly watch, but with a calm despair,
O'er the sad relics, snatch'd in haste away
From the destruction of that fiery day,
Saved from the general loss; alas! how small
The scanty remnant of their earthly all!
Alas! what numbers else all-pensive gaze,
And view enveloped in the general blaze,
All that long years of tedious toil had won
Consumed at once, and every hope undone;
Of house and home and property bereft,
And not a vestige or a relic left
To mark the spot, or tell where such had been,—
Memorial of the desolating scene.—

What boots it to prolong the mournful tale?
And what can lengthen'd narrative avail?
Not with that night when ceased the blaze to glow,
Ceased the sad havock and the reign of woe.—
Where shall the destitute a shelter find
From the fast falling rain, and blowing wind?
Where shall the weak and helpless seek a shed,
A resting place to lay the aching head,
And heavy heart? who shall the want supply,
The pressing want and dire necessity
That follows fast, or who a banquet spread
To fill the starving multitude with bread?

What kindly hand shall clothe the shivering frame,
Escaped in rags the fury of the flame?
What heart compassionate the poor, distress'd?
What soothing voice console the anxious breast,
That mourn, in hopeless grief, some missing friend,
While sad reflection shudders o'er his end?

Conclude we then:—my midnight lamp expires—
My spirit ebbs, my gentle muse retires,
Slow to Parnassus' steep she wends her way,
And leaves behind this desultory lay.